

This is why there is hope for psychiatry

In the past twenty years there has been a growing concern that psychiatry as a profession is in crisis (1-3) and that there is a shortage of psychiatrists worldwide (4), which may have an impact on the delivery of effective mental health care. Attempts to counterbalance this trend have been on the agenda of many international associations, including the WPA, the European Psychiatric Association (EPA) and the American Psychiatric Association, amongst others (5-7). Many of these associations have established specific workstreams aimed at addressing the educational needs of early career psychiatrists, and identifying the reasons behind low levels of interest and recruitment into psychiatry among medical students (e.g., 8).

The WPA was one of the first associations to give attention to early career psychiatrists, with a specific young psychiatrist scientific track made available at World Congresses, starting from Hamburg in 1999 up to Buenos Aires in 2011. At these meetings a range of activities were dedicated to early career psychiatrists, including scholarships, training seminars, scientific symposia, and informal get-together meetings.

The WPA Executive Committee, in the triennium 2008-2011, placed great emphasis on developing and inspiring early career psychiatrists, with one of the Action Plan goals being "to promote the professional development of early career psychiatrists worldwide" (9). A WPA Council of Early Career Psychiatrists was appointed, with 60 countries from all continents each nominating an early career psychiatrist to participate and represent their peers. The Council has implemented a specific action plan aimed at identifying problems concerning early career psychiatrists and promoting their professional development through a series of activities (10,11).

Three surveys have been conducted by this group: one dealing with training in psychotherapy (12), one with training and practice of early intervention in mental health (13), and one dealing with the transition from psychiatric training to independent practice (14), which represents a crucial step in the professional development of every psychiatrist.

Also based on this experience within the WPA, early career psychiatrists are now being considered equal partners in research activities as well. For example, within a large European Commission funded project, the ROAMER, a survey was conducted on priorities for mental health research, with the participation of different categories of stakeholders (15). Associations of psychiatric trainees were included, as well as associations of psychiatrists, of other mental health professionals, and organizations of users and/or carers. Moreover, the European Federation of Psychiatric Trainees (EFPT) and the Early Career Psychiatrists Committee of the EPA have recently created a task force

on research, with several projects carried out so far (6), and many others still ongoing.

The importance of supporting early career psychiatrists is now well recognized worldwide, and the majority of national psychiatric associations have now a section for this category of psychiatrists, with its own rules and by-laws. There are also some transnational groups, for example in East Africa, Asia and Europe, whose common interest is the professional development of early career psychiatrists (16-18).

Many educational activities worldwide are now co-organized with early career psychiatrists, who have identified the areas where they have the most significant educational needs and gaps, including psychopathology, forensic psychiatry, leadership and research skills, and comorbidity of mental disorders with physical diseases (6,7,19-21). Several actions have been taken to address these educational needs, including the organization of scientific events and the production of books (22) and educational modules. For example, the EPA runs a highly successful annual summer school that brings together many early career psychiatrists working in Europe every year. Other courses have been organized in collaboration with various EPA sections, such as those on philosophy and psychiatry and on consultation and liaison psychiatry. A further educational activity, run by the Association for the Improvement of Mental Health Care Programmes, includes courses on leadership and research skills, and promotes research projects conducted by early career psychiatrists (e.g., 23). Among the educational activities of the WPA (24), the Section on Education, which has several early career psychiatrists among its members, is currently promoting a range of initiatives aimed to improve the availability and quality of psychiatric education.

An important challenge for early career psychiatrists today is the promotion of the public image of psychiatry (25,26). The specific skills needed to interact effectively with families, administrators, journalists and the legal system should become a formal component of post-graduate training and continuing medical education of every early career psychiatrist (6).

Many further activities promoted by or devoted to early career psychiatrists could be listed here. However, what we wanted to highlight with this letter is that psychiatry is still alive, growing and developing and will certainly survive the current "crisis". We should consider the present one as a developmental phase, that can help us improve our training, research and practice. This in turn will take us further towards our ultimate aim – that of improving the health and well-being of our patients.

The WPA, with its early career psychiatrists' programmes and initiatives, has played a crucial role in these

developments. Early career psychiatrists are ready to contribute to further activities.

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